

Because He Touched Me



Lionel Hartley

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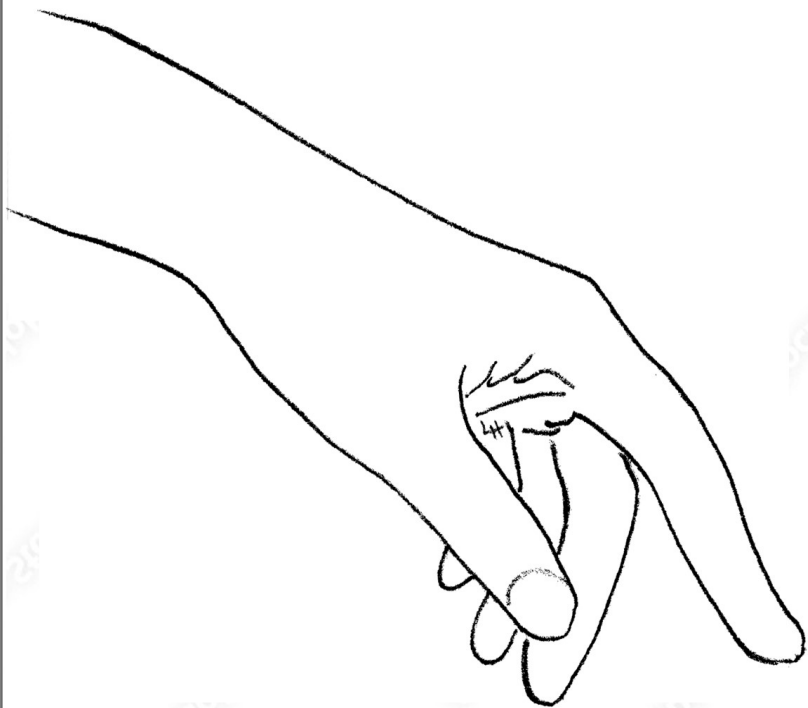
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A homily by Lionel D C Hartley

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Contents

Introduction	7
The Touch of the Master's Hand	9
Healing Touch	15
A Call to Touch	23
Our Need for Touching	31
Touching Others	37



Introduction

By a volunteer who has asked to remain anonymous

Dr Lionel Hartley preached this sermon at the Inverell Uniting Church in 2014 without the use of any notes. It was recorded on an audiocassette by a volunteer from Red Range Radio but the quality was too poor for broadcast.

Because many listeners to the original presentation wanted a copy, it was transcribed by Red Range Radio volunteers in their studio for publication as a printed tract.

We have retained Dr Hartley, original conversational style of preaching by transcribing this homily word-for-word.

While the exact words "He touched me" won't be found in the Bible, the idea comes from several New Testament passages where people were healed after touching Jesus, or by Jesus physically touching them.

For example: The woman with the issue of blood, described in Mark 5:25-34 and Luke 8:43-48. After suffering for 12 years, she believed that if she just touched his clothes, she would be made whole. Her faith and action resulted in immediate healing.

Jesus healing the leper, the story being found in Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45, and Luke 5:12-16. In a culture where lepers were isolated and untouchable, Jesus reached out, touched him, and said, "I am willing; be clean".

And the healing the blind man of Bethsaida, as recorded in Mark 8:22-26, Jesus physically touched a blind man's eyes and restored his sight.

In this sermon, Dr Hartley leaves the listener (reader) with a challenge to reach out and touch others.

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— Volunteer, Red Range Radio, NSW

Part 1

The Touch of the Master's Hand

In 1926 Myra Ross Welch penned the following poem that may already be familiar to many of you:

'Twas battered and scarred and the auctioneer
thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much
time on the old violin, but he held it up with a
smile:

"What am bidden, good folks?" he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?" "A dollar! A
dollar!" then "Two! Only two?" "Two dollars, and
who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars once, three dollars twice . . . and
going for three . . . " but no. From the room, far
back, a grey-haired man came forward and picked
up the bow.

Then, wiping the dust from the old violin, and

tightening the loosened strings, he played a melody pure and sweet, as a carolling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer with a voice that was quiet and low, said, "What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars! And who'll make it two? "Two thousand! Who'll make it three? "Three going once? Three going twice? "And going . . . and gone!" said he.

The people cheered but some of them cried, "We do not understand! What changed its worth?" — Swift came the reply, "The touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune and battered and scarred with sin is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd much like the old violin.

A "mess 'o pottage" A glass of wine. A game and he travels on. He's "going" once and "going" twice and "going" . . . and almost "gone"

Then along comes the Master, and the foolish crowd never can quite understand the worth of a soul or the change that's wrought by the touch of the Master's Hand.

Allow me to share a similar experience:

He was an old organist of the celebrated Freiburg Cathedral in Germany, but now that his fingers had lost their skill, he was made custodian of the great organ.

One day a visitor came to the cathedral and asked to play the organ, but the custodian refused. "No one but myself and the present organist ever touch the keys," the custodian objected.

But the visitor pleaded until he was given permission to play a few notes. He slipped into the seat and touched first one note and then another.

Then, running his fingers over the keys, he filled the whole cathedral with such beautiful music that the organist was entranced.

When the visitor finished, the old custodian came to him and asked his name. And the visitor replied, "Mein Name ist Felix Mendelssohn."

And until the end of his life, the old organist would exclaim over and over, "*Zu denken, ich fast verpasst Anhörung Mendelssohn spielen auf meinem Orgel!*" ("To think I almost missed hearing Mendelssohn play on my organ!")

How many souls have been the losers for not letting the Master touch their hearts with heavenly music.

I am not a television viewer as we have chosen not to have television in our home, but one of my adult sons was telling me about a television commercial trying to get us to make long-distance phone calls. The slogan attached to the advertisement was "*Reach out and touch someone.*" It tapped into everyone's need to be touched.

There is actually something very healing about being touched. Studies prove it. People who aren't touched are sicker than others.

In the prologue to the book *'Leadership Jazz'*, Max DeFree writes:

“Esther, my wife, and I have a granddaughter named Zoe, the Greek word for life. She was born prematurely and weighed one pound, seven ounces, so small that my wedding ring could slide up her arm to her shoulder.

The neonatologist who first examined her told us that she had a 5 to 10 percent chance of living three days. When Esther and I scrubbed up for our

first visit and saw Zoe in her isolette in the neonatal intensive care unit, she had two IVs in her navel, one in her foot, a monitor on each side of her chest, and a respirator tube and a feeding tube in her mouth.

To complicate matters, Zoe's biological father had jumped ship the month before Zoe was born. Realizing this, a wise and caring nurse named Ruth gave me my instructions.

‘For the next several months, at least, you're the surrogate father. I want you to come to the hospital every day to visit Zoe, and when you come, I want you to rub her body and her legs and arms with the tip of your finger. While you're caressing her, you should tell her over and over how much you love her, because she has to be able to connect your voice to your touch.’

God knew that we also needed both his voice and his touch. So he gave us not only the Word but also his Son. And he gave us not only Jesus Christ but also his body, the church. God's voice and touch say, "I love you."



Part 2

Healing Touch

Frederich Sachs wrote, "The first sense to ignite, touch is often the last to burn out, long after our eyes betray us, our hands remain faithful to the world.

I think it was Sarah Ban Breathnach who wrote, "Touch is the first physical sense we experience as strange hands pull us from the dark realm into the cold harsh light.

After the security and warmth of the womb, frigid air assaults our fragile naked bodies until we find comfort in our mother's arms with the sense of touch guiding our first conscious moments.

For many people, touch is also the last sense we experience as we depart this world — the squeeze of a loved one's hand. Sight, smell, hearing and taste have gone before us."

I remember reading a certain poem a number of years ago and I kept a copy for my files. From an anonymous pen, to the best of my recall, it read:

I am your baby, please touch me!
Not just when you feed me and diaper me
But stroke my legs, my arms,
my back, my head.
Hold me close in tenderness that says,
"I love you."

I am your teenager, please touch me!
I need to feel a fond love
Coming through your hands, your arms;
I need to see it in your eyes,
Hear it in your voice,
Even when we disagree.
Some of me is still a child —
Please touch me!

I am a child with a family of my own,
put your arms around me
Mother, Father, when my heart aches
With heartaches you have known.
Now that I am a parent,
I see you differently and love you more.
When you embrace your grandchildren —
Don't forget me!

I am your aging parent, please touch me!
The way my mother did
When I was young.
My hair is coarse and grey
But please stroke it.
My hand is wrinkled but hold it.
Embrace my tiring body.
I need your strength —
Please touch me!

Touch is powerful. Touch can heal and touch
can destroy. Power is power for good or for ill.

So touch can be nurturing or it can be abusive.
So much depends on both the toucher and the
touched.

We each come from different cultures,
backgrounds, and sets of experiences. So I can't
assume that my touch means to you what I want it
to mean. I have to be aware of your personal space.

Sometimes I need to ask, but mostly I have to
be sensitive. I can't assume that what would be
healing to me would be healing to you.

Yet we see in scripture and experience in life
that we are healed and we heal in our contact with
each other.

Mark 5:21-43 reads: And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea.

22) And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet,

23) And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.

24) And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him.

25) And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,

26) And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,

27) When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.

28) For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.

29) And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.

30) And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?

31) And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?

32) And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing.

33) But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

34) And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

35) While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?

36) As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.

37) And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.

38) And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.

39) And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.

40) And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

41) And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.

42) And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.

43) And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.



Part 3

A Call to Touch

A soldier who had been through a long campaign once declared that the order to "close up the ranks" drove away from him all sickening fear in entering on the battle, for the touch of other men at his elbows made him feel he was one of a vast host, and thus the sense of individual peril was forgotten.

I read in the *Sydney Sunday Herald* that the mere act of touching someone you love may add years to their life and ours. The article went on to say that according to California researchers, in order to maintain emotional and physical health, a person needs eight to ten "meaningful touches" — that's a kiss, a hug or a stroke — by a parent, friend or spouse each day.

They say that if an aggressive type-A personality male hugs his wife several times a day, he can add up to two years to his life.

Touching lowers blood pressure and raises the amount of blood haemoglobin for the toucher and the touchee.

There is no more effective way to do the work of Christ in this world than through touching. I believe that God calls us to reach out and touch the lonely, the destitute, the widow, the orphan, the elderly, the sick and lame.

Why do I feel that way: "Because He touched me".

While songwriter/musician Bill Gaither was accompanying Dr. Dale Oldham on his evangelistic crusades in 1963, the preacher said to him, "Bill, the word 'touch' is a very popular word. It comes up so often in the New Testament stories about Jesus touching people's eyes and healing them, or touching people's lives and changing them. It's a special, spiritual word and you ought to write a song that praises His touch."

So Gaither did and this is what he wrote:

Shackled by a heavy burden
'Neath a load of guilt and shame
Then the hand of Jesus touched me
And now I am no longer the same

He touched me, oh He touched me
And oh the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I know
He touched me and made me whole

Since I met this blessed Saviour
Since He's cleansed and made me whole
Oh, I will never cease to praise Him
I'll shout it while eternity rolls

He touched me, oh He touched me
And oh the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I know
He touched me and made me whole

When I had a malignant tumour on the brain
many people prayed for me. Does it always work?

Maybe that depends on what we mean by
"work." We all die. We're mortal. And most of us
don't choose how or when this mortal life ends.

Sometimes many people pray for a healing.
Sometimes they use an anointing touch and
ceremony. Sometimes the results seem like a
miracle, sometimes they are. Sometimes people
feel that God refused to listen.

We live within the mystery of the Divine, and

we pray in the awareness that the results are beyond our control.

God is not a tool to be used for our will. Rather, we are to be tools to be used for God's purposes. That being said, I firmly believe prayer really works. Some people are able to affirm that, even as they die.

We may not get the results we hoped for, but the presence of the Master Healer brings wholeness, which is the most important thing.

The possibility of healing, it seems, is built into the universe. Most religions have healers. They all demonstrate results to varying degrees. From the shamans and witch doctors, to the dances of Sufis, to Hindu rites and Buddhist meditation, human beings somehow discover the Source of healing and are made whole.

Notice we are talking here about physical healing and not salvation.

Mark 1:40-45 reads: And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

41) And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

42) And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

43) And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;

44) And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

45) But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

This story from Mark is one expression of that process. First we heard Mark in chapter 5 express Jesus' authority regarding the Sabbath and the Holy place of the synagogue casting out spiritual demons. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Then Jesus goes immediately to an ordinary house and heals a

woman of a physical fever.

Jesus is Lord of the secular world and of both men and women-even in a time when women weren't supposed to count.

Here in Mark chapter 1 Jesus takes on yet another dimension: Dirt. Uncleanliness. Defilement.

So we move from the holy to the ordinary to the lowest of all circumstances. Jesus is Lord of all.

So what is that to me? To us?

The scripture says this man had a skin disease. Some translations say leprosy. That's Hansen's disease in today's medical books. But we don't know exactly what it was except that he was unclean. He was an untouchable. He was an outcast. He was believed to be deservedly the bottom of the barrel both societally and religiously.

Jesus helped him in the process of getting clean.

I believe it was Don Bubna who said, "Jesus didn't have to touch lepers. He could have been just as effective from a hundred yards away. But he

touched them".

In both the Elisha story and the story from Mark, the process of getting clean includes both the action of the healer and the action of the one wanting to be healed.

Elisha makes Naaman wash in waters sacred to Elisha but not to Naaman. Naaman does his part despite his misgivings. The man in Mark has to fulfil the ritual law of Moses to get his license to be treated as a human. He was already clean, but needed to do his part even afterwards.



Part 4

Our Need for Touching

“Tis the human touch in the world that counts
The touch of your hand in mine
That means far more to the fainting heart
Than shelter or bread or win

For shelter is gone when the night is o'er
And bread lasts only a day
But the touch of your hand
And the sound of your voice
Sings on in the soul always.”

— Anon

We can find ourselves as Naaman did or the man in Mark's Gospel who needs to get clean. We may carry guilt, shame, or a sense of being rejected or deserving to be rejected. Or we may have a physical disease or disability that makes us feel less than whole.

We can tap into this story for the assurance that Jesus reaches out to touch us with healing grace and love.

No one is beneath the reach of the One who created us, sustains us, and eventually calls us home.

The unclean man tells Jesus, "If you want to, you can make me clean."

So, Mark tells us, Jesus was filled with pity. Increasingly experts in ancient Greek, say the translation should be "filled with anger." It's a footnote in many Bibles today. Whether pity at the man's condition or anger at society's response, Jesus touched the unclean.

Feel the touch. Can you do that? Find whatever within you needs that touch, and feel it.

Then realize you are not simply the unclean one. You are also part of the Body of Christ.

Where can you find a leper? Who is considered unclean? Who do some people look down upon? How can you touch them?

Keep those thoughts in mind as we move on.

The evangelical preacher Mike Huckabee writes that when his son John Mark was 4 years old he was out playing in the back yard and got a splinter in his foot. He came in and held up his foot. He was crying, and he said, "I got a splinter in my foot!"

Mike said "Sit on the couch. Let's look at it." So Mike looked at it.

Then, as John Mark held up his foot and his father reached over to pull the splinter out (because he knew it would feel better), the boy said what every kid says (which this day we still don't understand): "Don't touch it!"

Mike said, "What do you want me to do? Take a picture of it and mount it on the wall? I've got to touch it, Son. I don't levitate splinters out of your foot. There is no choice."

"It will hurt," he moaned.

The Dad said, "It might, but it won't hurt as long. It will sure feel a lot better when I get the splinter out."

But somehow that wasn't adequate. So the boy's mother (Janet) held down the top of him while Mike tried to hold down the bottom of him and pull the splinter out. He was kicking and screaming and jerking in all different directions, and here the father was with the tweezers, trying to pull out the splinter, afraid that he would jab those tweezers way up into his foot.

Mike says that he wanted to say to him, "Son, don't you trust me? What do you think I'm going to do, cut your foot off? I'm not here to hurt you. I'm here to help you, and if you don't let me help you, it's going to get worse not better. Trust me; I'm your father. I love you. I care about you. I do this only to help you. Be still. Relax."

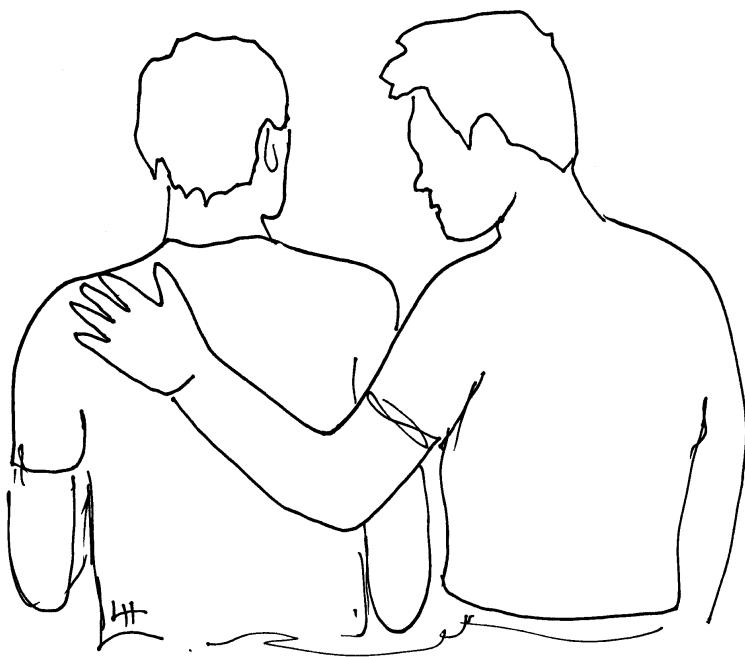
Sometimes God in heaven must look down upon us, and we must be like a little child who says, "God, I'm hurt. God help me." God reaches in to help us, and the first thing we do is say, "God, don't touch me! Don't do that God!" God is saying, "But I've got to reach in there and deal with the hurt. It may hurt a little, but I've got to do it." We say, "No, God. Please, nothing like that!"

So here we are fighting with God. It is the equivalent of being in surgery when the surgeon has both of his arms up to his elbows in your

abdomen, and suddenly you decide that you don't want to be operated on and try to get off the table.

How many times in our lives do we find ourselves on the surgery table of the Almighty, where God is trying to work in our lives that miracle of making us like Christ, and when we realize what God's doing, we wake up and say, "God, I don't want you to do this. Let me out of here."?

Christ touches us at our most unclean level, and we are called to touch the unclean among and around us.



Part 5

Touching Others

It appears that an anonymous writer penned these words hesitatingly:

'What is all this touching in church? It used to be a person could come to church and sit in the pew and not be bothered by all this friendliness and certainly not by touching.

I used to come to church and leave untouched. Now I have to be nervous about what is expected of me. I have to worry about responding to the person sitting next to me.

Oh, I wish it could be the way it used to be; I could just ask the person next to me, "How are you?" And the person could answer, "Oh, just fine." And we would both go home...strangers who have known each other for 20 years.

But now the minister asks us to look at each other. I am worried about that hurt look I saw in

that woman's eyes.

Now I am upset because the person next to me cried and then apologized and said it was because I was so kind and that a friend was what was needed right now. Now I have to get involved. Now I have to suffer when this community suffers. Now I have to be more than a person coming to observe a service.

That man last week told me I had never known how much I had touched his life. All I did was smile and tell him I understood what it was to be lonely.

Lord, I am not big enough to touch and be touched. The stretching scares me. What if I disappoint somebody? What if I am too pushy? What if I cling too much? What if somebody ignores me?"

This same writer was later able to pen this prayer: 'O Lord, be here beside me. You touch me, Lord, so that I can touch and be touched. So that I can care and be cared for. So that I can share my life with all those others that belong to you.

All this touching in church, Lord, it is changing me!

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with potato crisps and a six-pack of lemonade, and he started his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his lemonade when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry so he offered her a potato crisp.

She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a lemonade. Once again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave but before he had gone more than a few steps; he turned around, ran back to the old woman, and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later his mother was surprised

by the look of joy on his face. She asked him,
"What did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked,
"Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?"

She replied, "I ate potato crisps in the park with God." But before her son responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

Too often we under estimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

People come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. To touch the heart of another person, use your heart.

Mary Taylor Previte, the administrator of the

Camden County Youth Centre in New Jersey wrote, "If our faith does not touch people with love, it's selfish; a blessing only to us."

Recently in our evening family devotions we read the verse, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."
(James 1:22 KJV)

The next morning my wife Rosemary said that her back felt sore.

I responded. "If you come closer, I'll tell you how it feels to have your back massaged."

As she drew near I began to tell her how nice it feels to have a caressing hand in contact with one's back, a firm but gentle pressure, a caring touch administered with compassionate concern, loosening muscles and relaxing the whole body.

As I continued to tell her how wonderful it would feel to have her back massaged, she interrupted me to say that rather than just hearing about it, she would much rather actually experience it. Hearing about it was good, but not what she really needed or wanted. (Gratefully, she knew I was teasing her.)

The lesson applies to our talk about our Saviour. It is really great to talk about what we could do for Him, to talk about what we will do for Him, to talk about where we could go for Him, but what He really wants is action.

Here is my challenge: Because He touched you, whom will you touch today?

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